

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DIST: 12 MARCH 1991

COUNTRY: EL SALVADOR

SUBJ: DISCUSSIONS AMONG SENIOR SALVADORAN MILITARY OFFICERS

REGARDING THE JESUIT CASE

DOI: EARLY MARCH 1991

TEXT: 1. IN EARLY MARCH 1991

DISCUSSIONS" AMONG SOME ESAF COLONELS AND LIEUTENANT COLONELS
REGARDING THE JESUIT CASE.

OFFICIAL POLICY OF THE JOINT GENERAL COMMAND (EMCFA) REMAINS ONE OF
SILENCE ABOUT THE CASE, SOME SENIOR ESAF OFFICERS DISCUSS THIS ISSUE
IN CONFIDENCE.

THE CONSENSUS OF THESE OFFICERS IS THAT
THOSE ACCUSED IN THE CASE ARE GUILTY, BUT WILL RECEIVE LITTLE OR NO
PUNISHMENT. THEY AGREE THAT THIS WILL HAVE VERY SERIOUS
REPERCUSSIONS ON SALVADORAN RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES.

- DISCUSS THIS CASE OFFICIALLY OR OPENLY, THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE OFFICERS WHO COMMENT PRIVATELY BELIEVE THAT COLONEL GUILLERMO ((BENAVIDES)) DID IN FACT ORDER THE KILLING OF THE JESUITS. THESE OFFICERS SPECULATE THAT BENAVIDES DID NOT MAKE THE DECISION ALONE; HOWEVER, THEY DO NOT HAVE A GOOD SENSE OF WHETHER ANYONE HIGHER UP IN THE ESAF STRUCTURE WAS INVOLVED IN THE ACTUAL DECISION. THE OFFICERS, AMONG THEM JOINT STAFF OPERATIONS DIRECTOR COLONEL ROMAN ALFONSO ((BARRERA)), BELIEVE THE DELIBERATE MANNER IN WHICH THE TROOPS CARRIED OUT THE MURDERS GIVES SENIOR OFFICERS THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY WERE CARRYING OUT SPECIFIC ORDERS.
- 3. DESPITE THIS CONSENSUS, SENIOR OFFICERS ALSO BELIEVE THE OFFICERS ACCUSED IN THE CASE WILL PROBABLY BE ACQUITTED OF AT LEAST THE MAJOR CHARGES, AND POSSIBLY EXONERATED COMPLETELY.

THERE EXISTS AN EXCELLENT CHANCE THE CASE WILL BE.
DISMISSED OR THE CHARGES REDUCED BASED ON LACK OF EVIDENCE.
ADDITIONALLY, HE BELIEVES THE LABYRINTHINE AND INCOMPETENT SALVADORAN
JUDICIAL SYSTEM WILL FURTHER CONFUSE THE CASE, FURTHER BENEFITTING
THE ACCUSED OFFICERS.

4. ALL THE SENIOR OFFICERS WHO PARTICIPATE IN PRIVATE. DISCUSSIONS OF THE JESUIT CASE AGREE THAT THE ALMOST INEVITABLE. MISPRISION OF JUSTICE WILL SEVERELY DAMAGE FUTURE U.S./EL SALVADOR RELATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE. THEY REALIZE THE U.S. CONGRESS KNOWS PROGRESS IN THIS CASE IS NONEXISTENT, AND THAT THE MILITARY AID THEY HOPE TO RECEIVE IN MARCH 1991 IS VERY MUCH CONTINGENT ON POSITIVE RESULTS IN THE CASE. THEY ALSO UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT INTERNAL ESAF DYNAMICS AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE "TANDONA" (THE MILITARY ACADEMY CLASS OF 1966) WILL COME INTO PLAY, AND DESPAIR OF A SUCCESSFUL AND FAIR OUTCOME.

